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ABSTRACT

This booklet is the fifth in a series designed to assist parents who are home-schooling their adolescent children and deals with high school requirements and college admissions. The articles in this booklet are: (1) "'How Do We Know When We're Done?'," concerning criteria for high school graduation, college recommendations, and evaluating home-schooled students; (2) "Independent-Study and Umbrella Schools," discussing the reasons home-schooling families use independent-study schools (diploma-granting institutions requiring a certain number of units within several traditional subject areas) and umbrella schools (schools requiring documentation of work within very broad subject categories), and questions to consider in selecting such schools; (3) "College Admissions Tests," describing the purpose of several admission tests, preparation and registration resources, and strategies for poor test takers; and (4) "Changing Face of College Admissions," describing how some colleges and universities have developed admissions policies specifically for home-schoolers, discussing how students can use these policies to plan high school home- schooling, and providing advice for coping with changing policies. (KB)

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HAPPILY HOMESCHOOLING TEENS:

High School Requirements & College Admissions

by Cafi Cohen

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"HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE'RE DONE?"

by Cafi Cohen

If you attend high school, it's simple. From roughly the ages of 14-18, you sit in a chair six hours a day for 180 days each year. You study carefully balanced amounts of English, math, social studies, and science, and take extras like foreign language, physical education, and drama. Do all that with passing grades, and they give you a diploma.

But how do homeschooling families decide when their teenagers have completed high school? What combination of academic work, accomplishment, and time is enough? How do families evaluate their teenager's learning and decide What's Enough?

EXTERNAL CRITERIA

Some homeschooling families decide What's Enough by adopting someone else's standards for a high school diploma. The two most commonly used external criteria are (1) tests, like the GED, and (2) diplomas from independent study schools.

In California, homeschoolers may take the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE). A few other states offer specialized high-school-diploma-equivalent tests. In addition, California and most other states offer the GED, tests of General Educational Development. Many colleges and employers recognize a passing GED score as the equivalent of a high school diploma.

Some homeschooling families subscribe to external standards by enrolling their teenagers in diploma-granting independent-study schools. These families adopt the independent-study school's criteria for graduation and the end of homeschooling.

What is enough for these independent-study high schools? Like government high schools, they generally require a certain number of units in math, English, social studies, and science for graduation. Depending on the school, enrollees must earn anywhere from 16 to 28 credits for a diploma, a credit being the equivalent of a one-year high school course.

Other schools, which I call umbrella schools, may not have specific subject requirements. Instead they require documentation of work – usually as hours spent – within very broad categories. Most umbrella schools award one credit for anywhere from 90-180 hours of work. Many are very flexible with respect to what counts. They grant fine arts credit for volunteering with a community drama group, science credit for a 4-H animal project, English credit for self-selected reading, and history credit for watching video documentaries.

Using external standards, as determined by a test or independent-study school, has advantages. You, the parents, get to feel safe. You can say, "We've covered all the bases." Tests and external diplomas provide independent-of-the-family certification of your teenager's competence with respect to high school work. And your teenager is responsible to someone outside the family.

The downside? While the resulting paper trail is pretty, some kids find the actual educational experience less than inspiring, even unenlightening!

FAMILY CRITERIA FOR GRADUATION

There are alternatives, the first being a radical idea for those used to thinking in traditional terms: many homeschooling families decide for themselves what constitutes high school graduation. These families use one or more of the following criteria to set goals and make decisions about finishing high school:

*local high school diploma requirements;
*college recommendations;
*time spent;
*age of the homeschooler;
*ability to support oneself financially;
*teenager's evaluation of his readiness to move on.

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

One of the first sources many new homeschooling families consult to answer the questions "What?" and "How much?" are the local high schools. Homeschooling parents examine typical programs and see four years of English, three to four years of math and social studies, two to three years of science – plus a smattering of foreign language, physical education, art, and music. Then these homeschooling families assemble their own materials, using high school requirements as a guide.

COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS

For the traditionalists among us, a second (often better) source of information of Who Learns What When in high school is the suggested course of study recommended by your teenager's first choice college. Most high schools based their requirements on preparation suggested by colleges. For that reason, I suggest that all homeschoolers who use traditional diploma requirements as a guide bypass the high school filter. Read college entrance recommendations for yourself, and make your plans accordingly.

Go to the library, and examine one of the many college review guides, like Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges*. When you read the lists of recommended preparatory work from different colleges, you will notice three important points.

First, when referring to high school courses, most colleges do not list requirements (they reserve that word for standardized tests, completed application forms, proof of US citizenship, and so on). Instead colleges suggest or recommend courses of study. Why would they recommend rather than require certain high school subjects?

For one simple reason: not all public and private high schools offer all courses. Most colleges want the flexibility to offer admission to applicants whose high schools may not offer Latin or Advanced Placement Physics. Because colleges suggest courses of study rather than require them, absence of one or more particulars in your homeschooler's portfolio or transcript is not critical. Suggested courses of study are just that: suggested.

Second, as you peruse the recommended preparation for different colleges, note the wide variation. One school suggests three years of English plus two years of social studies, science, and math. Another more competitive school recommends four years of English, social studies, math, and science – plus at least three years of foreign language. Why prepare for Harvard when your teenager plans to attend the local state college?

Third, consider a point not explicit in colleges' guidelines: there are an infinite number of ways to address recommendations in each discipline (English, social studies, science, math). Take the recommendation for, say, three years of science.

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Traditional high schools offer biology, chemistry, and physics to help their students satisfy recommendations for science study. Yet other scientific topics are just as acceptable. Consider meteorology, geology, microbiology, ecology, oceanography, parasitology, hematology, electricity and electronics, herbal medicine, and botany. Pursuing projects in depth impresses college admissions officers just as much as taking the standard science sequence.

Similarly, how kids tackle subjects – whether through volunteer work or hands-on projects or textbooks – is not critical, at least to college admissions officers. For example, working with a wildlife rescue team and documenting the effort is a valid way to address biology.

One college admissions officer says, "With students from small private schools, we are very interested in seeing how they handled the lack of foreign language or laboratory science. The same holds true for homeschoolers. The more creativity and initiative an applicant shows with respect to educational challenges, the better."

TIME ON TASK

Another way to decide when your teenager has completed high school involves keeping track of hours spent on each subject and relating the hour totals to a certain number of credits. For example, when our daughter accumulated 90 hours of self-selected reading and 30 hours of writing (correspondence and creative fiction), we called that 120 hours or 1 credit of English.

Similarly, another teenage homeschooler spent 300+ hours working on a community drama production. Her parents, in their homebrew transcript, gave her two high school credits for a course they called Drama.

Schools, for the most part, operate this way, giving credit for seat time or time on task. While that is enough to make many of us leery, we should remember how easy it is to rack up hours and how positively colleges and employers view the resulting documentation.

AGE

Another criterion some homeschooling families employ to delineate the end of homeschooling is the teenager's age. Families arbitrarily decide that graduation will occur in June (or any other month) of the year their homeschooler turns 18 (or 17 or 19 or whatever they feel is appropriate).

While this almost sounds too simple, too good to be true, it works very well in some circumstances – probably because those are the ages that kids are want to take on the world, ready or not. Like writer Raymond Duncan says, "The best substitute for experience is being 17."

TRADE/SELF-SUPPORTING SKILL

One of the most interesting approaches I have heard to the "When are we done?" issue comes from a homeschooling mother in Georgia. She told all her children that they could consider themselves graduated from high school when they had a trade that would allow them to support themselves. This woman's oldest daughter became a piano tuner, using this skill to work her way through college. Her next child, a son, built a WEB page design business.

TRAILBLAZERS

As we approach the next millenium, tens of thousands have segued from homeschooling to college and the workplace. In deciding what constitutes high school homeschooling and how and when to make the transition, many

homeschoolers find it helpful to read about the experiences of these trailblazers. Grace Llewellyn's first two books, The Teenage Liberation Handbook and Real Lives, contain some excellent profiles of homeschoolers moving into the larger world full time.

Additionally, at my website, Homeschool–Teens–College www.homeschoolteenscollege.net, I have several college admissions essays written by teenage homeschoolers. Read these to see a wide variety of approaches to high school, including what these teenagers' families deemed to be enough.

BACK AT 'YA!

Some families rely on their teenagers' sense of when they are ready to move on. The kids graduate at 15 or 18 or 20 years of age. It all depends on when the homeschooler's activities and interests dictate a move away from parent-facilitated learning.

In one homeschooling family, the kids began attending classes at the local community college at age 14 or 15. That was it – graduation and the end of parent-directed homeschooling, in the sense of mom teaching the kids.

In our family, an overseas travel opportunity beckoned, and our daughter left home for the first time at age 16 to spend several months in Australia. That really was the end of her homeschooling, although we did not know it at the time.

"I'LL ALWAYS BE A HOMESCHOOLER"

Some homeschoolers never graduate in the sense that there is no sudden change in lifestyle, no clear-cut graduation. While their parents may award a diploma at some point, these homeschoolers continue living as they have been, following their noses, going to college, finding employment, and gradually moving new areas of interest and experience.

One grown homeschooler I spoke with said that she always wondered when she would stop being a homeschooler. Currently she attends college part-time, works part-time, and does some volunteering. At age 21, she's come to the conclusion that she will always be a homeschooler: she will always spend her time finding those with similar interests to help her pursue her goals.

WHAT WORKS

All of the above approaches work. It all depends on your priorities and your teenager's interests and goals.

And, as the parents of several homeschoolers have pointed out to me, it's okay not to clearly define the end of high school. Often, the end emerges naturally, just in the course of living. This is scary, but it works well for some families. Other families will prefer clearly delineated goals – and that's okay, too.

How to decide? Should you establish goals? If you do set goals, which goals? Or should you subscribe to somebody else's standards? Consider the following:

*Listen to your teenager's ideas. If your daughter persuasively argues that she should spend all her time with, say, horses – and if she convinces you – go for it. Let her do her thing, sit back, and enjoy the show.

*Make teenagers aware of your ideas with respect to their teenage years. The more you discuss this topic, the more clearly your homeschooling will reflect the best that both you and your teenager have to offer.

*Research external standards – those listed by local high schools, colleges and universities, independent-study and

umbrella schools. Examine these lists critically and ask questions.

*Similarly, read books, and access on-line bulletin boards to research the experience of other homeschoolers.

*If the thought of anything non-traditional makes you apprehensive, use an independent-study school, like American School in Chicago, Illinois. If you would like an externally-generated paper trail together with a lot of flexibility, consider an umbrella school like Clonlara in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

*Consider your experience with education and the relationship of formal and informal education to life. And then – here's the hard part – trust yourself. Do what makes the most sense for your situation.

Even when our children were young, we believed that if we could help them discover the work that suited their hearts, minds, and souls, and helped them to be productive and happy members of society, then we would have reached our goal as parents. But it took many years before we were sufficiently resistant to conventional measurements and the expectations of our peers to finally let our deepest convictions lead the way. Eventually we realized more consciously that our primary goal was to help our children uncover their passions, and that the goal came to transcend all others, including attaining high test scores, comparing a child's achievements to her peers', meeting other people's agendas, seeking the prestige of honors or college admittance.

--Susan Shilcock

INDEPENDENT-STUDY and UMBRELLA SCHOOLS

by Cafi Cohen

A homeschooling mom in Maryland writes:

"We use an umbrella school. This gives us the freedom to unschool our teenage son without state oversight. Otherwise we must follow state curriculum requirements, maintain traditional records, and submit to local supervision. We believe unschooling is our son's only chance to break out of the failure and defeat he experienced in public school special education programs."

Umbrella schools and independent study programs (ISP's) – defined simply as schools that help homeschoolers homeschool – come in more flavors than Baskin-Robbins ice cream. Most are private; some are run by public school districts. Many are Christian; an increasing number specify no religious worldview. Some are highly structured; others boast complete flexibility with respect to what your teenager learns, how he learns, and when he learns it.

While not for everyone, homeschooling families around the country use ISP's and umbrella schools for different purposes. Should you consider one? To help you answer that question, two sections follow: (1) reasons homeschoolers use ISP's and (2) questions for any umbrella schools and ISP's on your short list.

REASONS FOR ISP's

No Government

In some states, umbrella schools are an excellent way to protect yourself from inappropriate government demands. Do you find your district's or state's curriculum, testing, and reporting requirements unreasonable or even inexcusable? No problem. Satisfy the compulsory attendance statutes by enrolling your teenager in a umbrella school (ideally one with a flexible program). Clonlara Home Based Education Program in Michigan (see sidebar) is an example of one independent study program that has considerable experience dealing with difficult school districts.

Accredited Diploma

Some families homeschooling older kids say they use independent-study schools, like the traditional, structured American School in Illinois, because they want "an accredited diploma". Actually, in such cases, it is the school – not the diploma – that is accredited. The graduate earns a diploma from an accredited institution, not an accredited diploma.

Why are homeschooling families concerned about accreditation? Primary for college admissions, it seems. While my research indicates that most colleges do not require a diploma from an accredited institution, policies do change. For this reason, query colleges and universities about diploma requirements before your teenager enrolls in an independent-study school.

Additionally, illegitimate accreditors exist. Ask individual umbrella schools about their exact type of accreditation to assure a match with any college or university you may find that requires graduation from an "accredited program."

Independent Evaluations

Another lure of ISP's for some teenagers? They seek external assessment and validation. One mother writes, "We have always homeschooled Mark, who told us recently that he preferred to deal directly with other adults for academics. At age 14, he wants to bypass the 'parent' filter. He also likes working in a structured manner, for grades. An independent-study program provides these."

Group Activities/Resources

Some local umbrella schools provide a cornucopia of activities and resources that rivals anything offered at local public and private schools -- everything from choirs and orchestra to science and foreign language to competitive sports like basketball. Umbrella schools also may maintain resource rooms with microscopes, laboratory equipment, foreign language videos, and much more.

Money

I hear most often from Alaskans about public fund reimbursements for homeschoolers enrolled in their public school independent-study programs (ISP's). The minor attached strings and substantial monetary compensation makes Alaska sound like homeschooling nirvana.

Some Alaskan school districts give families roughly $1,000 per year per kid to spend on supplies and equipment, plus a family computer and internet access. Principal restriction? Money cannot be spent for religious materials. My homeschooling friends in Alaska use the funds primarily for music and horseback riding lessons, math manipulatives, science materials, foreign language videos, and reference materials.

There are other public school independent-study programs throughout the nation, but few as generous (or as minimally intrusive) as those in Alaska. In California, many school districts have public school independent study programs. Unfortunately, many of these require that you use the public school curriculum and submit to weekly teacher visits and yearly standardized testing. Still, some families welcome the free books and appreciate the teacher support.

Get Your Feet Wet

Some homeschooling teenagers choose independent-study schools to give themselves a taste of traditional academics prior to college. One mother writes, "I fear my daughter would be the 'rabbit frozen in the headlights' if her first exposure to tests, textbooks, note-taking, and grading occurred in college. She's told me she prefers a foretaste at home."

Record-Keeping

Not a few families say they use umbrella and independent-study schools for record-keeping. With data you submit and/or from test grades, the school grants credits, assigns grades, computes a GPA, sometimes even assigns a class rank – all to create an official transcript.

Of course, with preplanning or with a lot of hot coffee and a couple of all-nighters (for us procrastinators), you can write your own transcript (see my book *"And What About College?": How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities* for more record-keeping details for grades 6-12). Some argue, though, that an external transcript is more believable than one hatched on your word processor. Others say, "I would rather walk ten miles in a snowstorm than write a transcript," and happily delegate the paperwork.

Covering All The Bases

Some families choose independent-study schools to ensure that their teenagers receive a "well-rounded education." After years of perusing scope and sequence listings (Who Learns What When), I have yet to figure out what constitutes The Best Set of Facts and Skills and Attitudes. Nevertheless, you and your teen may find a compatible program, one that gives you confidence you have crossed all the T's, dotted all the I's.

Expertise For Difficult Subjects

Lastly, a few families have told me that they prefer using independent-study schools because they offer difficult subjects, like lab science or foreign language. Having French on video or high school chemistry with a kit and teacher you can contact anytime by phone or email attracts many.

SHOP SMART

Ready for some window shopping? Accompanying this column is a list of diploma-granting, national-enrollment umbrella schools and independent-study programs. You should add your local and state umbrella schools to this list (get names and addresses from homeschooling support groups in your area). What follows are questions to help you narrow down the resulting list.

The questions do not have "right" answers. Instead, use information the schools give you (1) to find the best fit for your teenager and (2) to decide if you need an umbrella or independent-study school at all. To discuss independent-study schools with current users, check out the Independent-Study High-School Message Board <http://www.paradise-web.com/plus/plus.mirage?who=jlg>.

- What is the educational philosophy and worldview of your school or program?
- Will you mediate with local school officials if they have objections to our teenager's enrollment in your school? (Obviously not a question to ask of public school ISP's.)
- What are the backgrounds of the owners/founders/operators of the school or program? What are the backgrounds of the staff? Were they public school teachers, private school teachers, homeschooling parents?
- How much access does the enrollee have to mentors, support teachers, administrators? 800 number? E-mail?
- How many years have you been in business?
- How do you deliver formal coursework? Strictly by mail? Via modem/computer? Video and audiocassettes?
- What are your fees? Does this include all books, study guides, and extra materials like laboratory equipment and foreign language tapes? Do fees include the diploma?
- How many enrollees do you have? How many graduate each year? What are your alumni doing now?
- How many mentors and support teachers do you have? If you assign one mentor/teacher to each homeschooler, how many teenagers are assigned to each instructor?
- What is your turn-around time to return graded and evaluated work to the enrollee?
- What records do we need to keep? How do you assign grades?

- Does your school or program offer foreign language? Which languages and how many years? How about a laboratory science? Which science courses include a lab?
- To complete grades 9-12 in four years, approximately how many hours each day do enrollees average using your materials?
- Can enrollees test-out or challenge required courses?
- What is your money-back-guarantee time period for review of initial materials?
- How do you assign credit for previously completed high school work?
- Can enrollees work on materials at their own pace? What is the minimum enrollment period to earn a diploma?
- If your school has a fixed course of study, can we make reasonable substitutions (e.g. World Literature for English Literature or Bookkeeping for Consumer Math)?
- If you offer "computer" courses, what, exactly, does that mean? E-mail with instructors? With other students? Synchronous, on-line classes? Self-paced on-line classes? Integration of the WEB into instruction?
- What do your transcripts include?
- Do you give credit for volunteering/sports/music/etc.?
- What additional services do you offer? On-line classes, graduation ceremonies, resource rooms, activities, conferences?

See the Homeschool-Teens-College website for an updated list of independent study programs: http://www.homeschoolteenscollege.net

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

by Cafi Cohen

PSAT, NMSQT, SAT, SAT II, ACT, AP, CLEP. If you have never negotiated the college admissions process, this list sounds like a head splitting alphabet soup. Nevertheless, once you understand their uses, you can probably eliminate all but one or two of these tests. If your teenager tests well, you will want to learn strategies to capitalize on results. Good test scores lead to admissions to selective colleges, as well as big scholarship money at any school. For a teen whose talents lie in other directions, avoid it all! Read on for

- The purpose of each test
- Preparation and registration resources
- Strategies for poor test takers

PURPOSE OF EACH TEST

SAT I and ACT

The two principal college admissions tests are the Scholastic Assessment Test I: Reasoning Test (Short name, SAT I; old name, SAT) and the American College Testing Assessment (ACT). Roughly 85% of colleges and universities require results from one or the other. Midwestern colleges more often require the ACT. Institutions in other regions generally require the SAT I. Some schools, like the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, will accept either an ACT or an SAT I score.

SAT I and ACT formats differ. The SAT I, considered a "general abilities" test (as opposed to a recall-type examination), consists of three timed verbal sections and three timed math sections, plus an "equating" section that does not count towards the test score. The verbal sections include reading-and-answer-the-question passages, analogies, and sentence completions. Each math section

includes quantitative comparison questions, multiple-choice questions, and student-response questions (no choices provided). Question difficulty ranges from arithmetic computation to factoring (algebra) and solving problems using first-year geometry. See the College Board web site (sidebar) for sample questions.

The ACT test sections are English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. Some say that the ACT demands more subject recall, especially in the Science section. While the SAT I emphasizes reasoning ability and "creative" thinking, the ACT tests content. Stated another way, the SAT I measures aptitude for college-level work, while the ACT measures retention of typical high school subject matter. See the ACT web site for sample questions.

To determine which test(s) to take, contact the admissions offices of colleges of interest. They will tell you one of four things:

- "We require the SAT I."
- "We require the ACT."
- "We require either the SAT I or the ACT."
- "We do not use SAT I or ACT test results to make admissions decisions."

Fortunately, the number of colleges in the last category is steadily increasing (more than 280 nationwide, at last count). FairTest in Cambridge, Massachusetts, continues to track those colleges and universities that have eliminated standardized tests for admissions decisions. Schools they list include Antioch College of Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio; Bemidji State University, Bemidji, Minnesota; Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts; and Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas. Contact FairTest (see sidebar) for the complete list.

PSAT/NMSQT

Although optional, the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) may be the first standardized college admissions test your homeschooler encounters. As a pre-SAT I, many teenagers use this as a warm-up for the SAT I.

PSAT scores are also used to determine eligibility for National Merit Scholarships – hence the alternate name for the PSAT, the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT). Less than 2% of students qualify for National Merit Scholarship consideration. And less than ½ of one percent actually win scholarships. Discouraging? Not really. There are many other sources of financial aid. 99 percent of college students who accept financial aid, receive it from other sources. The places to begin learning about money for college are the individual college financial aid offices.

Typically, teenagers attending traditional public and private schools take the PSAT in grades 10 and 11, sitting for the SAT I the following year. While individuals may take the PSAT more than once, it is only the score obtained in what is identified as the test-taker's 11th grade year that will count for the National Merit Scholarship competition. Homeschoolers often do not use grade-level designations. No problem. Just sign up for the test about a year in advance of the college application process – and call that the eleventh-grade year.

SAT II Subject Tests

The SAT II Subject Tests (formerly called Achievement Tests) were originally used by very competitive colleges and universities to assess applicants, in other words to compare the high SAT I scorers. That meant that most college applicants never had to take the SAT II tests. This is still true. More than 90 percent of colleges and universities do not require SAT II scores.

SAT II's differ from the SAT I. SAT II's cover specific content areas. Examples are SAT II Biology, Spanish, Writing, American History, and Math (tested at the level of Trigonometry and Calculus) . Most colleges and universities that use these test results require one to three SAT II scores.

Unfortunately, in the last five years, an increasing number of colleges and universities (some not very competitive) have decided to require SAT II Subject Tests from homeschoolers. The worst example is Georgia Institute of Technology and the other Georgia state colleges. From homeschooled applicants, they currently require six SAT II Subject Tests (the number will grow to eight by the year 2002). Regular applicants who attended public and private schools need not submit SAT II Subject Test scores. Other colleges with discriminatory policies include Rice University in Texas and Notre Dame in Indiana.

Bottom line on these schools? Work hard and play their game – at least they have honestly told us ahead of time where they stand on admissions for homeschoolers. Or seek an alternative. Less than two percent of the more than 4,000 institutions of higher education in this country discriminate against homeschoolers. Vote with your feet, and apply elsewhere. Their loss.

AP and CLEP Tests

Advanced Placement (AP) and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests are unique because good scores may result in college credit – without ever stepping foot into a classroom. The AP and the CLEP tests (like the SAT II Subject Tests) cover specific subjects, like Chemistry, French, Geography, and World History. While the material on the SAT II's is supposed to be "high school level," the AP and CLEP test the subject content at the college level. This allows some colleges to grant college credit for passing scores. More than 2,800 accredited colleges award CLEP credit. Obviously, earning this credit shortens the overall time to degree. Before taking these tests, ask colleges of interest how they interpret AP and CLEP scores and if they grant credit for one or both.

Individuals need not enroll in specific AP or CLEP classes, or even use specific materials to prepare for the tests. Instead, homeschoolers may use their own materials and proceed at their own pace, covering material they know the examination tests. While colleges do not require either AP or CLEP test results for admission, all college admissions and financial aid officers will be impressed by good scores on these tests.

PREPARATION

Preparation for all tests should begin with a study guide showing the test format and sample test questions. Many experts say that familiarity with the test format will raise most SAT scores by 50-150 points (out of a total of 1600). From most public and private high school counseling offices you can obtain free registration materials which will include a description of the test and sample questions. Similar information is available on the WEB (see Resources sidebar).

In addition, you may want to invest in one of the many SAT-preparation books and CD's on the market (available in the study guide section of any large bookstore). We were particularly fond of the Princeton Review publications, which help the test-takers think like the test writers and give tips to answer questions, even when the examinee recognizes none of the vocabulary!

Probably the best preparation for the general abilities tests (SAT, ACT, PSAT) is wide-ranging reading over a variety of topics, fiction and non-fiction, science,

history, art, and poetry. Most of those who study Latin or take a course in Greek and Latin roots feel that that preparation is also helpful.

Math preparation is trickier. Supposedly, math through first year algebra and geometry suffices to answer test questions, but it seems that those who score highest have taken math through second year algebra and trigonometry. One Florida homeschooler recently took another approach. She had an excellent vocabulary and expected to well on the verbal part of the PSAT. Math was another story – not a good subject for her. But she was interested in the National Merit Scholarship competition – in other words, she wanted to do extremely well on the PSAT/NMSQT. Using only PSAT and SAT I study guides, she spent an entire year not on math texts, but instead on PSAT/SAT math preparation. It worked. She became a National Merit Scholarship Finalist.

The subject-specific tests (SAT II, CLEP, AP) present homeschoolers an opportunity to shine in areas like Biology, Russian, American History, Writing, and so on. As such, these tests are more amenable to study than the general abilities tests. In other words, time expended learning the subject is more likely to raise a subject-specific test score than a general abilities test score.

REGISTRATION

Homeschoolers can register independently for the SAT I and SAT II, the ACT, and for CLEP tests. They simply obtain registration materials directly from high school counseling offices, from the test publishers, or online, and complete the registration form.

The PSAT and AP tests are different story. Because these are school-based tests, homeschoolers must sign-up through an institution authorized to administer the test. For the PSAT, specifically, check with local public and private schools for their willingness to accommodate homeschoolers. While most tests are given several times each year, the PSAT is given once, in early October. Do your shopping for a testing school the previous June, if at all possible.

STRATEGIES FOR POOR TEST TAKERS

Some teenagers freeze when tested. No matter what their knowledge or skills, they have difficulty with timed, written assessments. Here are some suggestions for those individuals.

*Use the FairTest list (cited above), and apply to colleges and universities that use other data (letters of recommendation, work samples, interviews, essays, transcripts) to make admissions decisions.

*Research colleges thoroughly, and apply to schools that, while they may require an SAT or ACT score, admit almost everybody, regardless of score. Most of these institutions state that they practice open admissions or are classified as non-competitive or only mildly competitive by various college admissions references.

*Consider "back door" college admissions. With the "back door" process, you simply take classes as a non-degree-seeking student at a college or university. Then, one to three semesters down the road, you apply to a degree program using the college transcript as evidence that you can handle the work.

*Retake tests. Some teenagers improve the second time around. Do educate yourself about how your colleges of interest treat re-test situations. Some average the scores. Others take the highest overall score. Still others will take the highest math-verbal combination. Most experts do not recommend taking a given test more than three times.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*Take one or more SAT II Subject Tests, even if they are not required. It is generally easier to raise an SAT II score through study and preparation than to raise an SAT I score. Consider offsetting the a mediocre SAT I score with one or more high SAT II scores.

*Take one or more college classes concurrent with high school homeschooling. Good SAT I scores merely correlate with college success. A's and B's in college classes prove college success.

*Document all activities, academic and non-academic. Good documentation (which should begin at ages 12 or 13) includes a transcript or portfolio, letters of recommendation, coherent essays, samples of work, and a reading list. I cover documentation for grades 7-12 in detail in my book, *"And What About College?"*. Read the first chapter online at my web site.

"What school, college, or lecture bring to men depends on what men bring to carry it home in."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."
Derek Bok

"A college education seldom hurts a man if he's willing to learn a little something after he graduates."
Anonymous

TESTING RESOURCES

ACT Registration, www.act.org, P.O. Box 414, Iowa City, IA 52243-0414

AP Examination Information www.collegeboard.org/ap/students/index.html; (888) CALL-4-AP or (609) 771-7300

AP Services, PO Box 6671, Princeton, NJ 08541-6671, 609-771-7300

CLEP P.O. Box 6601 Princeton, NJ 08541-6601 (609) 771-7865; free copies of CLEP Colleges, "CLEP Information for Candidates and Registration Form" as well as more information about CLEP

College Board Essay: *The Path from Homeschool To College* www.collegeboard.org/features/home/html/intro.html

College Board OnLine, www.collegeboard.org; info on PSAT, SAT I and II, AP, and CLEP examinations

College Board SAT I Program Information www.collegeboard.org/sat/html/students/indx001.html; online registration, sample questions, test preparation, and more

Cracking the SAT, 2000 Edition by The Princeton Review (Editor), Adam Robinson, John Katzman

FairTest: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing, fairtest.org, 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 864-4810

National Merit Scholarship Corporation, 1560 Sherman Avenue, Suite 200, Evanston, IL 60201-4897, (847) 866-5100

Pennsylvania Homeschoolers AP Online Courses, www.pahomeschoolers.com/courses

10 Real SAT's by Cathy Clayman

CHANGING FACE OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

by Cafi Cohen

Five to ten years ago, college admissions officers viewed homeschooled applicants as a novelty. I can picture them passing these applications around the office, commenting favorably on some, raising their eyebrows at others. The admissions personnel I interviewed back then said that they thoroughly reviewed all homeschoolers' applications. Many institutions went the extra mile, asking for extra documentation from those who submitted skimpy information. The objective: give the homeschooled applicant a fair hearing.

Of course, nothing stays the same. The novelty has worn off. Some colleges now see dozens of homeschooled applicants each year. We should not be surprised; we all know that homeschooling is growing.

While it is impossible to get an exact count of homeschooled kids in the United States, researchers' estimates confirm the impression of growth. Five to ten years ago, various investigators figured there were 500,000 to 1 million students in home-based education programs in the United States. Now the numbers range from 750,000 to 2 million.

Additionally, while ten years ago homeschooling primarily involved younger children, more families now homeschool teenagers. Peruse the workshop offerings at recent conferences. "Happily Homeschooling High School," "Terrific Teens," and "Decompression: Beginning Homeschooling With Older Students" are typical of topics seen frequently now, almost never ten years ago. Similarly, consider the explosion of diploma-granting, independent-study schools with nationwide enrollment. Ten years ago there were not more than five or six. Now, I count dozens.

Of course, this translates into more homeschoolers applying to college. How many? Last year (1996-1997), Grove City College, a selective institution in Pennsylvania, admitted 19 homeschoolers; ten years ago, they admitted none. Massachusetts Institute of Technology had four homeschooled applicants last year. Harvard University admissions personnel estimated they routinely see three to five homeschoolers apply each year.

In view of the increase in homeschooled applicants, some colleges and universities have responded with admissions guidelines and application evaluation procedures that apply only to homeschoolers. This is big news – for two reasons. First, the written policies – some good and some discriminatory – give homeschooled kids advance notice as to how their application will be viewed at various colleges. Second, homeschoolers, with guidelines in hand, can better plan their preparation to ensure a successful application.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS POLICIES FOR HOMESCHOOLERS

How can the written policies help you choose colleges? Picture Institution A requesting a transcript, complete with grades and a calculated grade point average, versus Institution B which simply requires descriptions of what you have done plus a reading list. If your homeschooling has been less structured, your kid might prefer the relaxed approach of Institution B, not only for the application, but also for the campus atmosphere.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What kinds of policies have selective colleges and universities written for evaluating homeschooled applicants? Many places – like Stanford in California, the Air Force Academy in Colorado, and Wheaton College in Illinois – try to be as specific and fair as possible, while remaining true to their overall mission. It is almost as if a homeschooler sat on the policy-writing committee.

Stanford, in their admissions letter for homeschoolers says: ". . . we do not have a required curriculum or set of courses for applicants to Stanford. . . . Primarily, we want them to be able to demonstrate that they have successfully undertaken a serious, rigorous course of study. They should definitely provide a detailed description of their curriculum when they apply, but it is not necessary to follow a prescribed or approved homeschooling program. . . the central issue for us is *how* they have gone about the learning process, not how many hurdles they have jumped."

Stanford's letter also says, "In all students, we look for a clear sense of the intellectual growth and quest for knowledge. . . Homeschooled students may even have a potential advantage over others in this aspect of the application since they have consciously chosen and pursued an independent course of study. In particular we would like to hear from them. . . about how the family chose homeschooling, now the learning was organized, what benefits . . . they have derived from the experience."

Stanford is not alone in asking applicants why they chose home education. Many admissions officers, including those at Vanderbilt in Tennessee, Rice University in Texas, and Wesleyan University in Connecticut, expressed the same concern. They all wanted clear explanations *why* the family and the applicant chose a home-based program for grades nine to twelve. Prepare to answer this question!

Wheaton College in Illinois, a selective Christian school, sends out a complete packet for homeschooled applicants. It includes "Questions and Answers About Homeschooling and College," a suggested high school curriculum, a reading list, and a home schooling questionnaire. Like some of the institutions named above, one of the questions is: "What factors led to your decision to home school?" The packet is available free; call Wheaton College at 800 222-2419.

Other schools, like Southern Methodist University in Texas and Rhodes College in Tennessee currently have discriminatory policies, most notably in the area of standardized testing. They require *more* standardized test results from homeschoolers than from other applicants. Most commonly, these schools ask for results of additional SAT II Subject Tests (e.g. Biology, Writing, Spanish, American History, Geography).

While the discrimination against homeschooled applicants is unfair and unjustified, maybe we should be glad they are telling us, up front, exactly who they are and where they place their values. Knowing that, you can steer around them if you agree that assessing potential with extra standardized tests is unfair.

USING POLICIES TO PLAN HIGH SCHOOL HOMESCHOOLING

If you have your sights set on certain colleges, having the policies in hand can help you plan *what* to do and *how* to do it. Of course, there is always the danger of compromising learning today to please an admissions officer two to three years down the road. However, if the written policy fits in well with what you are doing today, why not cross all the T's and dot all the I's?

For example, the Air Force Academy's admissions letter for homeschoolers includes the following paragraph. "Home-schooled students compete against the

same standards as students coming from a traditional school setting. In our admissions formula, academics account for 60 percent of the overall score. Extracurricular activities (both athletic and non-athletic) make up 20 percent with the remaining 20 percent coming from a combination of Admissions Liaison Officer interview and Selection Panel review. In the absence of graded coursework completed at a public or private high school, we place greater weight on the standardized ACT and SAT scores." The Air Force Academy's letter goes on to suggest ways that homeschooled applicants can satisfy both the academic and the extra-curricular requirements.

Those aiming for selective colleges and universities, as well as those seeking big scholarships to any school, should heed the advice of Stephen Farmer, Assistant Admissions Officer at the University of Virginia. He says that any applicant to a *selective* college (like UVA) will want to exceed the stated requirements. Why? Because all *successful* applicants – kids who attend school and homeschoolers alike – go far beyond "typical course of study."

Recognize that all kids in home-based programs have an advantage here. Yes, homeschooling families can set the bar higher. More significantly, homeschooled teenagers have *time* to pursue topics in depth. And they also can change the typical high school "course of study" format by doing unusual things. Examples are traveling, operating a business, studying arcane subjects like historic costume design, and pursuing unusual topics like animal husbandry or aircraft maintenance. The unusual often catches the eyes of admissions officers.

Of course, homeschoolers may also exceed requirements in more traditional ways. Several seem to work consistently. First, accumulate college credits during the high school years. For this purpose, check out correspondence courses, on-line courses, and local adult education and community college classes. Second, work on interesting community projects that will generate good letters of recommendation from people outside the family. And last, plan to take SAT II's (Achievement Tests) and AP (Advanced Placement) Tests, even when these tests are not mandatory.

ADVICE TO COPE WITH CHANGING POLICIES

*Policies regarding evaluation and admission of homeschooled applicants are in a state of flux. Some college and universities have them, some do not, and some are in the process of writing them. It is even possible that something I have written here will outdate by the time this is printed. Given that, do not rely on what anyone outside of an admissions office tells you about the current policy at a given school. Last year's procedures may not apply this year. Get your own information from colleges and universities by telephoning, e-mailing, or writing to them.

*Homeschoolers, *more* than other applicants for college admissions, need the counsel of college admissions personnel. The recommendation of Stephen Farmer of the University of Virginia, is echoed nationwide: "They [homeschoolers seeking admission to competitive institutions] should seek this advice early, prior to the ninth grade year, if possible."

*Compare the admissions policies of several similar colleges and universities to find user-friendly schools. Institutions that appear comparable with respect to course offerings and size and other factors may require very different documentation. Colleges with bureaucratic applications or discriminatory policies towards homeschoolers send up a red flag. There are too many good places that welcome homeschooled applicants to focus on those that are actively discouraging. *Their* loss.

RESOURCES

Web Sites

Homeschool – Teens – College
www.homeschoolteenscollege.net
My WEB page contains college application essays that worked from real teenage homeschoolers; a list of good-news, bad-news college admissions policies; Stanford's letter to homeschooled applicants; and the first chapter of my book: *"And What About College?" How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities.*

Colleges That Admit Homeschoolers at School-Is-Dead-Learn-In-Freedom.
learninfreedom.org/
colleges_4_hmsc.html

Karl Bunday has assembled an impressive list of colleges that have confirmed admission of homeschoolers plus a Frequently Asked Questions page on homeschooler college admissions.

Books

"And What About College?" How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities by Cafi Cohen
"College or Not?" by Patrick Farenga
The Teenage Liberation Handbook by Grace Llewellyn
College Admissions: A Guide For Homeschoolers by Judy Gelner

BOOKLETS IN THE SERIES: **HAPPILY HOMESCHOOLING TEENS** by Cafi Cohen

MOVING INTO THE WORLD
*The S Word
*Ideas for Teen Homeschooling Groups
*Volunteering
*Transition To The World Of Work
*Learning To Fish: Networking

DO IT YOURSELF, DO IT BETTER, DO IT FOR LESS
*Less Is More
*Putting Together An Eclectic Curriculum
*Self-Directed Learning
*Lexicons, Map Books, and Synonym Finders

THE THREE R'S
*Developing A Writer's Toolkit
*Encouraging Reading
*Rethinking Midschool/HighSchool Math
*10 CounterIntuitive Math Teaching Tips

BEYOND THE THREE R'S
*Habla Espanol?
*History For Everyone
*Learning and Doing Science
*Lifetime Fitness

HIGH SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS & COLLEGE ADMISSIONS
*"How Do We Know When We're Done?"
*Independent-Study and Umbrella Schools
*College Admissions Tests
*Changing Face of College Admissions

ENCOURAGEMENT
*First Year Surprises
*Decompression FAQ
*Dealing With Doubts
*"But I Want To Go To School!"
*Ten Reasons To Homeschool Through High School

Cafi Cohen, homeschooling mom, is the author of ***"And What About College?" How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities, 2nd Edition*** (Holt Associates, 2000) and ***Homeschooling: The Teen Years*** (Prima, 2000). She writes columns for *Home Education Magazine, Homeschooling Today,* and the *LINK*. Her website, Homeschool-Teens-College, contains helps for families homeschoooling 11-18 year-olds at www.homeschoolteenscollege.net. She also presents workshops at homeschool conferences nationwide. For more information about Cafi's books and workshops, contact her at: 805 473-4963 or 473-9045 or at cfcohen@pacbell.net.